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Andriescu, Monica

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Andriescu, M. (2009). Identity Politics under National Communist Rule: the Rhetoric Manifestations of Nicolae Ceaușescu's "Nationality Policy" in 1970s Romania. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 9(1), 105-117.
<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-428679>

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Identity Politics under National Communist Rule

The Rhetoric Manifestations of Nicolae Ceaușescu's "Nationality Policy" in 1970s Romania

MONICA ANDRIESCU

Analyzing national communist rhetoric and its contingent aspects, this article proposes an interpretation of political discourse as formative for consciousness and identity in national communist Romania. Accordingly, my underlying intention is to inquire into how ethnic groups are articulated in order to prompt an increase in "group boundedness"¹. I take aim at surpassing the superficial layers of a written or oral statement while probing both into explicit and implicit meanings (subtext). Following Norman Fairclough's main argument, I deem that social and cultural transformations permeate discourse². The method of analysis that I thereby propose (Critical Discourse Analysis) surpasses the traditional ways of interpreting a text only through a mere linguistic analysis and recognizes that discourse is context-dependent. By extending this argument, one might even conclude that political discourse is the mirror image of the transformations that a society constantly undergoes.

I chose to only focus on the 1970s Romania, since my intention is to look at the period that witnessed the increasing hegemony of the discourse of the *nation* and laid the groundwork for the maturing regime repression of minority (as well as majority) rights in the 1980s.

The *aim* of this article is to identify the main themes of national communist rhetoric in 1970s and the main explanatory variables that have influenced the radicalization of measures designed for minority oppression and assimilation in Romania. The analysis is thus aimed at showing how national communist ideology and its attached rhetoric were primarily targeting power-preservation and regime legitimation.

I intend to disaggregate the complexity of the 1970s rhetoric by selecting what I deem to be the *three core recurrent themes* in Ceaușescu's discourse throughout this period, while assessing the progressive increase in focus on the nationalities as part of the overall power-legitimizing game. I thus trace the escalation of the following three rhetorical focal points: 1. the discourse of *full equality* between all Romania's nationalities; 2. the discourse of the ancient *unity* and *solidarity* of the Romanian people (inclusive of nationalities); 3. the discourse of the threat of perceived *reactionary external interferences* for Romania's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

¹ Rogers BRUBAKER, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 7-27.

² Norman FAIRCLOUGH, *Discourse and Societal Change*, Polity, Cambridge; Blackwell, Malden, MA, 1993. Norman Fairclough, following from the tradition of Michel Foucault's inquiry into discursive stances, has expanded this so-called "second generation" of discourse theory. They challenge "non-critical" analyses of discourse, while drawing on Michel Foucault's understanding of power and his social theory.

Puzzled by the causal links that have transformed chauvinistic nationalism into the trademark of the Romanian communist regime, I focus on the following research question: *why did chauvinistic national communist rhetoric escalate in the 1970s and 1980s in Romania?* I argue that the interplay between the following events and actions decisively influenced Romania's intensely assimilationist nationality policy: 1. The Romanian Communist *July Theses* of 1971 and the ensuing crisis triggered by Hungary's reaction; 2. The escalating bilateral relations between the two countries with a view to Romania's *nationality policy* following the 1977 Ceaușescu-Kádár summit; 3. The increasing protests of members of the ethnic Hungarian cultural elite in Romania against state-led minority oppression measures.

Although softened by rhetorical devices, the assimilationist drive was one of the core mechanisms of communist nation building. Switching to overt criticism of Ceaușescu's nationality policies, Hungary engaged in pushing for protective measures for its kin Hungarian minority. This was a significant factor of disturbance for the Romanian national communist view on national sovereignty and non-interference of external actors into internal affairs. In so doing, my intent is to view Hungarian kin-state politics not as a single explanatory factor, but to engage in a comparative analysis that explores not only the content, but also the context in which political discourse emerges and reflects on.

This analysis will thus show that one of the strongest independent variables that impacted on the progressive radicalization of Ceaușescu's nationality policy was Hungary's kin-state politics. I explore this phenomenon by looking at the rhetoric manifestations (mainly speeches) of Romania's reaction to several galvanizing events in inter-state relations.

As exposed at length by Raphael Vago¹, the most overwrought bilateral relations between Romania and Hungary went on during 1969-1987. This period is an inclusive match to that of the most intense forceful assimilationist attempts made by the Romanian state on the ethnic Hungarians on its territory. Various decrees that were passed indicated the ascending bias of Romanian ethnonationalist politics in the 1970s and 1980s: the *Romanianization* of education and culture was the overall purpose. Barefaced discrimination was in direct and contending relationship with the rising active opposition to assimilation by the Hungarian cultural elites in Romania. Thus, a second main explanatory factor that accounted for the radicalization of anti-minority policies was the opposition of Romania's Hungarians towards their assimilation.

Extending the argument further, I argue that once confronted with real political and social settings, even the most dogmatic ideologies tend to become contextualized and acclimatize to the surrounding conditions. Generally regarded as one of the most dogmatic incarnations of Stalinist Marxism, Ceaușescu's ideology epitomized a mixture of antagonistic tendencies. The theoretical fusion it underwent testifies that ideological compromises served legitimating purposes. Nevertheless, ideological bargaining with the purpose of preserving power eventually proved too rigid to adapt to the stark discrepancies between the rhetorical projections of the Romanian socialist nation and the existing reality.

¹ Raphael VAGO, *The Grandchildren of Trianon: Hungary and the Hungarian Minority in Communist States*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1989, pp. 201-260.

NATIONALISM, COMMUNISM, NATIONALITIES AND INTER-STATE RELATIONS

While emphasizing the rhetorical manifestations of shifting regime attitude towards nationalities, this section briefly explores a noteworthy juncture of Romanian communism – the discursive expression of the ideological fusion between socialism and chauvinistic ethnonationalism during Ceaușescu's rule. In so doing, I look into the relational nexus formed by the nationalizing stances of Romania and Hungary with regard to the rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania. This section also aims to briefly give account of the two key historical conjectures that place the discourse of nationalities in an international context and which are explanatory for what I consider as the three major rhetoric patterns concerning Romania's nationalities.

Theoretical Considerations on National Communism

I pursue the path initiated by George Schöpflin¹, who argues that regardless of the theoretical clash between socialism and nationalism, the Romanian communist leaders perceived the instrumental nature of manipulating national identities as a political resource and integrating such ideas into an outwardly internationalist ideology. My assessment is that not ideology was of supreme importance for the national communists, but securing the unwavering popular support that would preserve their power basis. My intention is not to downgrade the ideological dogmatism that Ceaușescu and his acolytes used as legitimacy-fortifiers, but rather to emphasize that ideology can acquire impressive malleability when political leaders face a possible de-legitimation. When it became apparent that Marxist ideology no longer sufficed as a basis for mass popular mobilization and support, an ideological shift towards populist ethnonationalism was readily taken. The tilting balance of the two discourses is apparent from the following quotation:

"We cannot overlook the fact that the role of the nation, the principles of national independence and sovereignty are underestimated – or even rejected – including from Marxist Leninist standpoints"².

Briefly put, the interplay between communist and nationalist dogmas was discursively rendered through two diverging ideological narratives, one designed for the Romanian majority and the other for the Hungarian minority. This substantiates the paradoxical nature of Romanian communism, which professed internationalist creeds to minorities while preaching a story permeated with national symbolism about an (re)imagined³ ethnic Romanian community to the Romanians – one based on continuity, independence, ancient roots and national heritage.

¹ George SCHÖPFLIN, *Politics in Eastern Europe (1945-1992)*, Blackwell, Oxford & Cambridge, 1993, p. 68.

² Nicolae CEAUȘESCU, *Națiunea și naționalitățile conclucuitoare în epoca contemporană*, Editura Politică, București, 1983, p. 65.

³ I consider the Romanian nation as being an "imagined community", in the sense that "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fel-

In brief, in its quest for legitimacy, the Romanian brand of national communism encapsulated the two major and often-colliding elements that defined its nature as well as illustrating its dynamics and its swerving rhetoric. I interpret the framing of Ceaușescu's discourse of the nation as characterized by the need to extend the regime's legitimacy beyond Marxist rhetoric and to profile Romanian identity on distinctly ethnic lines. Therefore, interpretation, legitimation, mobilization and the preservation of power are revealed as the core functions that rhetoric served under national communism.

Placing Rhetoric in Context

The 1970s witnessed a gradual increase in the overt pressure exerted by Hungary for the promotion of the Romanian Hungarian minority's situation onto the fore of the bilateral agenda.

The *first* turning point that I identify is the 1971 release of the *July Theses* by the Romanian Communist Party. This was the first key event in internal Romanian politics that transferred into the inter-state arena and whose impact I address in this article. The document epitomized Ceaușescu's radical ethnonationalist vision on the total control that the state should exert over all cultural spheres. I consider 1971 as the symbolic moment that heightened Hungary's concern for the fate of the Hungarian minority to the forefront of the relations between the two countries. The implications of the 1971 communist programmatic document boded ill for the rights of Romania's nationalities and activated Hungary's disapproving diplomatic reactions. It is for its symbolic significance that I have considered it as the departure point of my analysis.

1971 was also the symbolic official moment when Romania "deviated" from the socialist course by integrating conceptually antagonistic ideologies into an interdependent casing: this was the symbolic document through which the Romanian Communist Party rhetorically reconciled nationalism and socialism. It was argued that under the national communist regime, the previously class-divided Romanian nation had been *unified*. Consequently, since the legitimacy of the regime rested on this contention, its rhetorical patterns could only reinforce that idea, however dissonant from reality it may have been. The rhetorical portrayal was that of a society that had passed beyond interethnic conflict, and whose component *nationalities* were indissoluble parts of the socialist *nation*.

The *second* turning point occurred at the end of the 1970s. As exposed at length by R. Vago¹, following the 1977 agreements reached between Ceaușescu and Kádár (when the former ultimately agreed to insert the Hungarian nationality issue on the bilateral agenda), a swift worsening of the situation occurred. It is not the main purpose of this article to address the complexity of the subsequent events at length, but rather to aggregate them and extract their meaning for and impact

low-members, meet them, and even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.", according to Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, New York, 1991, pp. 6-7.

¹Raphael VAGO, *The Grandchildren of Trianon...*cit.

on the *discourse of the nation*. Accordingly, for the purposes of this article, I deem the year 1978 as the second key moment in the 1970s decade.

The favorable conditions for the Hungarian claim for the protection of the Romanian Hungarian's rights ought to be related to the part of the Helsinki Accord that dealt with human rights. Alongside the bilateral relations between Romania and Hungary, another significant part of the context was Romania's relations with the West and the pressures launched by the US for the protection of human rights in the communist camp. The Ceaușescu regime subdued to international pressures to include the nationality issue in inter-state relations in 1977, but failed to implement any of the agreements reached. Encouraged by the official endorsement of the Hungarian state, the Hungarian minority's elites of the 1970s and 1980s were among the strongest dissident voices that spoke against Ceaușescu's rule.

Károly Király has been the epitome of Hungarian dissent in Ceaușescu's Romania. Király was the Vice-President of the Hungarian Nationality Workers' Council. In 1977, he sent three letters in which he denounced the measures intended at the forceful assimilation of Romania's nationality to the leadership of the PCR. Király was dismissed from his function in 1978, but as a result of the abusive actions taken against him, he assented to the publication of his letters of protest in Western newspapers. The snowball effect of such an action is self-evident: the expected negative reaction of Hungary and the Hungarian Diaspora to one potent instance of minority oppression, while Ceaușescu radicalized his rhetoric and measures against the Hungarian minority as a defensive and legitimacy-seeking technique. Documented research shows that the Király affair triggered a new wave of curtailment of Hungarian cultural and educational rights, which in turn galvanized Hungary's overt criticism of Romania and prompted new protests (more or less visible) on the part of the members of the Hungarian minority.

These spiraling events impacted on Romanian policies as well as discourse. It is the manifestations in the latter that I intend to subsequently address.

DEFENSIVE AND OFFENSIVE POSTURES: THE RHETORIC OF EQUALITY, UNITY AND EXTERNAL INTERVENTIONS

As a general assessment of the evolution of the rhetoric of nationalities, the underlying message in Ceaușescu's discourse was that the legitimacy of the communist rule rested on the idea that the regime had brought the Romanian nation to its fulfillment – that ethnic feuds had been brought to an end, thus solving the "nationality question". As such, the regime's rhetoric could not openly use discriminatory language, as that would have entailed a self-undermining of its legitimacy. My account in the ensuing sections of this article will be an illustration of the assertion that a twofold stance was gradually adopted by national communist rhetoric: the interlocking with Hungarian open criticism of Romania's nationality policy led to a *defensive* ever-increasing stress on the equality between and unity of Romania's nationalities AND to an *offensive* full-blown campaign against Hungary's perceived interference in Romania's internal affairs. As follows, I break my analysis into sections that systematically address these patterns of discourse.

Full Equality *between Nationalities*

The world reified by Ceaușescu's rhetoric was a corrupted version of the real world. The former existed in parallel, was characterized by obsessive repetitiveness and was aimed at replacing the former. Creating a new convoluted and opaque regime *language* was a prominent feature of Romanian national communism. As it appears from Ceaușescu's speeches, political rhetoric was indeed the language of persuasion, and when structured into a credible narrative, it was instrumental in the legitimation of power.

It is important to note that Ceaușescu's rhetorical blueprint was keen on using such shortcuts in transmitting its intended message to the audience as a way of creating mental patterns. To add to the previous list, national communist rhetoric displays an obstinate use of set phrases such as:

"Full equality of rights", "the elimination of inequalities", "the rejection of all forms of bourgeois chauvinism and nationalism", "foreign reactionary circles", "interference in Romania's internal affairs", "ruthless adversaries of all forms of nationalism", "the nation [...] will continue to play – throughout the entire age of socialist and communist construction – a decisive role in the evolution of society", "socialism as an age of national reawakening", "the nation as the basis of the development of Romanian society", "socialism is the way toward achieving true national unity" etc.

One of the recurrent salient themes in Ceaușescu's discourse was his narrative of *equality*. Ceaușescu's rhetoric distinguished between the "Romanian nation" and the "co-inhabiting nationalities"; the former was inclusive of the latter (which designated the difference in ethnicity). In Ceaușescu's vision about the role of the *nation*, *equality* among the members of the nation was to be ensured without any consideration of the difference in *nationality*.

It was claimed that this allegedly indiscriminate attitude allowed for the "assurance of full equality among all Romanian citizens, irrespective of their nationality"¹. However, in national communist language, "the real equality of rights" actually meant equal working conditions for all members of the society, not a de facto guarantee of their rights². Equality was (conveniently if I may add) perceived in economic terms: inequality comes as a result of "regional backwardness", while equal rights are not possible without "harmonized industrialization"³. Along the same lines, "genuine equality – both social and national – can only be achieved with the disappearance of the exploiting classes"⁴. This was one of the instances where an inherently nationalist message was represented in socialist terms.

The shape that a discourse takes is also of relevance. In the Romanian case, the outward profile was often that of a historical account, intertwined with challenging, open-minded and even conciliatory slogans such as "the liquidation of

¹ Nicolae CEAUȘESCU, *Soluționarea problemei naționale în România*, Editura Politică, București, 1979, p. 8.

² See Nicolae CEAUȘESCU, *Națiunea și naționalitățile conclocuitoare...* cit., p. 101.

³ 1971 speech of Nicolae CEAUȘESCU, in *Romania on the Way of Building Up the Multilaterally Developed Socialist Society: Reports, Speeches, Articles*, vol. 5, Editura Meridiane, București, 1971, p. 674.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 675.

national and racial discrimination"¹. Such narratives are designed to use political means of communication to manipulate the attitudes of its target audience towards identification with the regime.

The Unitary Character of the Nation

"Scientific" arguments about the *unitary* character of the Romanian nation and state were constantly reinforced, although they often lacked coherence. The other nationalities were presented as part of the Romanian historical and social setting, as having striven in *solidarity* with the Romanians: "The working people – Romanians, Magyars, Serbians and Germans – have always fought and worked together"². As such, they enjoyed equal rights, as an endemic component of the Romanian nation (which purportedly was a non-ethnic concept).

The term "national minority" was conspicuous by its absence in Ceaușescu's rhetoric, as divisions between *minority* and *majority* did not accord with his *unitary* projection. The analysis of this frequent rhetorical pattern shows that it was invariably related to the depiction of the Romanian nation's struggle against foreign dominance. The undercurrent was an invariable argument that relied on the independence and national unity of the nation in fighting off *external intervention*:

"Socialism and national independence are closely united; national independence and international solidarity constitute a unitary whole"³.

During the first years of Ceaușescu's rule, a way of rhetorically curtailing the significance of the Hungarian minority was to never single it out and to refer to the "co-inhabiting nationalities" as a whole and as bearing equal status. However, as Romania's nationality policy became more focused on the Hungarians in the following decades, Ceaușescu also started to discursively identify the distinctiveness of the Hungarian minority in the nation building process. "The specific questions of the working people of the Magyar nationality"⁴ – while particular reference to them was generally avoided during the 1960s – became of distinct rhetorical concern during the 1970s. Although not always mentioned explicitly, the implicit reference to the Hungarian minority was glaring, especially in the diatribes again "external interventions": "The problems of Romania are solved by Romania [...] without any interference from outside, on behalf of anybody!"⁵.

Replete with historical misinterpretations, deviations or downright fabrications, Ceaușescu's speeches repeatedly brought forth historical arguments intended to reify the purported solidarity between Romanians and Hungarians.

I argue that in the early 1970s, Ceaușescu's nationality rhetoric articulated the major themes that would progressively radicalize throughout the late 1970s and the 1980s. During the early and less radical years of Ceaușescu's rule, it was

¹ Nicolae CEAUȘESCU, *Soluționarea problemei naționale...*cit., p. 73.

² March 1971 speech of Nicolae Ceaușescu, in *Romania on the Way...*cit., p. 681.

³ 1970 speech of Nicolae Ceaușescu, in *Romania on the Way...*cit., vol. 4, Editura Meridiane, București, 1970, pp. 803-804.

⁴ 1971 speech of Nicolae Ceaușescu, in *Romania on the Way...*cit., vol. 5, 1971, p. 684.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 689.

rhetorically emphasized that the nationalities were organic components of the Romanian nation and that they consequently enjoyed full rights. The overtone was that since they were an integral part of the Romanian nation, there was thus no need for separate rights since their identity was not distinct. Moreover, Romanian leaders saw more rights for the Hungarians in particular as the launching pad towards subversive actions contrived by the Hungarian state. One recurrent pattern exhibited by the Romanian side was to persistently neglect reference to the Hungarian minority in bilateral affairs, while the Hungary did the opposite.

One of the central themes exhibited, manipulated and constantly repeated in Ceaușescu's discourses was the idea of the unbreakable *unity* between the Romanian nation and the "co-inhabiting nationalities"; the underlying message was that the latter was an organic part of the former, due to centuries of co-existence and development in common. The undercurrent was that national interest prevailed over any type of group interest – ethnic, or of any other kind.

The significance of creating a strong unitary nation to serve the state building process is tellingly illustrated by the following extract:

"For a long time to come, the nation and the state will continue to be the basis of the development of socialist society [...]; not only does this not run counter to the interests of socialist internationalism, but on the contrary, it fully corresponds with the interests, to the international solidarity of the working people, to the cause of socialism and peace [...] [it] is an essential requirement upon which depend the strengthening of the unity and cohesion of socialist countries"¹.

Romanian communists argued that any form of nationalism should be extinguished; this allegation collided with the importance Romanian communists ascribed to the nation. My analysis suggests that the national communists traced a distinction between "the revival of the nation" and "nationalism". In other words, the distinction was made in conceptual terms, not in ideological content. The "revival of the nation" in Romania held positive connotations in Ceaușescu's rhetoric, whereas Hungarian "nationalism" was attributed various negative connotations. These two phenomena were portrayed as dissimilar and obviously contending. The basic difference was that while Romanian nationalism was depicted as evolutionary and ensuring "societal progress", Hungarian nationalism was seen as retrograde and irredentist – because it opposed the Romanian "revival of the nation".

I relate this to Ceaușescu's nationality policy by emphasizing that the Hungarian nationality was particularly emphasized as a potential center of internal opposition to the regime, one which was perceived as externally instrumentalized by Hungarian "reactionary" politics. The obvious undertone was that such actions were seen as disrupting the unifying balance that was so crucial for the legitimacy of national communists. In this outlook,

"An ethnically differentiated opposition can easily be depicted as consisting of particularly dangerous enemies: historical enemies, enemies who

¹ Nicolae CEAUȘESCU, *Romania on the Way of Completing Socialist Construction: Reports, Speeches, Articles*, vol. 1, Editura Meridiane, București, 1969, p. 60, quoted in Katherine VERDERY, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*, University of California Press, Berkeley, LA & London, 1991, p. 117.

do not accept the current identity of the state, enemies who are plotting to break up the state or to steal it for their own group"¹.

Fear of External Intervention

During the '70s, Romanian communists grew increasingly more apprehensive of Hungary's attempted involvement in what they deemed as essentially an internal matter. Hungary's articulation of its pro-Hungarian minority stance found its rhetoric rejoinder in regime statements such as that of Paul Niculescu-Mizil (one of the high-ranking communists): "Romania cannot permit any attempts at nationalism or chauvinism-mongering"².

In the late 1970s, national communist discourse gradually turned more historicist, more radical and more offensive. This marks a turning point in the evolution of Ceaușescu's rhetoric on the nationality issue, as it started to increase in the radicalism with which it defends the independence and the unity of the Romanian nation and reverts to historical themes to mobilize support. Unsurprisingly, this resulted in an increasingly critical attitude of the Hungarian state (manifested at the official level and through exchanges of articles), which developed across the 1980s and contributed to the most repressive decade of Romanian communism (not only for the nationalities, but also for the ethnic Romanians). It was at this point that the discourse of the "organic nation" clearly overshadowed the Marxist ideological elements of Ceaușescu's rhetoric.

The softer, less apprehensive tone of the 1960s and early 1970s was replaced in the late 1970s by forthright accusations aimed as a response to the increasing diplomatic pressures exerted by Hungary. The rhetorical weight attached to assumed attempts of "reactionary external interventions" that allegedly tried to destabilize Romania's unity, independence and national sovereignty run an escalating course throughout the 1970s. The international political context was thus increasingly projected into the official discourse, as Ceaușescu's "rhetorical concern for the nationalities became more pronounced"³.

Within this backdrop, an ideological incongruity appeared in the 1970s, namely the cumbersome interplay between internationalism, nationalism and nationalities. This was another instance when Ceaușescu's rhetorical arguments were at odds with the policies the regime actually set forth. They are, however, paradoxically aimed at justifying them. The ensuing quotation is illustrative of the flawed internal cohesion of Ceaușescu's arguments – he argues for Romania's independent path towards socialism, but he simultaneously rejects the very basis on which he makes this claim:

"Socialism and communism cannot be built on the bases of nationalities; there is no Romanian, Hungarian, German, Bulgarian, French socialism [...] The new social order entails the liquidation of exploitation, abuse and

¹ Donald L. HOROWITZ, "Democracy in Divided Societies", in Larry DIAMOND, Marc F. PLATTNER (eds.), *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Democracy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1994, p. 36.

² 1971 article published by Paul Niculescu-Mizil, quoted in Raphael VAGO, *The Grandchildren of Trianon...*cit., p. 204.

³ Mary Ellen FISCHER, *Nicolae Ceaușescu: A Study in Political Leadership*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder & London, 1989, p. 243.

social and national inequalities, the full equality of rights among all the citizens of a country, among all workers, regardless of their nationality"¹.

This quotation uncovers an overall infusion of and tension between socialist rhetoric and national rhetoric. Analyzing nationalist language can prove to be an effective tool in surveying how human psyche can be manipulated. Discourse is in the end a most powerful means of reproduction both of ethnic divide and of political power. As such, I argue that analyzing Romanian *national communist language* is a significant component of any comprehensive attempt to fathom its inner workings.

One of the catchiest nuances in Ceaușescu's rhetoric was its "firm" denunciation of

"any manifestation of chauvinism and nationalism, of any attempts by reactionary foreign circles to denigrate our party's and state's national politics, the construction of socialism in Romania"².

This passage is only one of many similar constructs that rhetorically discard nationalism. Inferring from this, my claim is that in the interpretation of Ceaușescu and his acolytes, *nationalism* acquired new overtones, which implicitly defined it as the inherent right of a nation to replicate its culture. The argument is made circular by explicit and recurrent statements that the *nationalities* are in fact components of the *nation*. Ceaușescu's discourses repeatedly emphasized the *external threat* (Hungary) more than the internal one (the Hungarian minority). This argument was progressively more visible once Hungarian foreign politics increasingly articulated critical positions towards Romania's nationality policy.

Rhetorically nurturing insecurities proved another valuable tool of mobilization and legitimization for the communist regime, as conspiracy theories ranked high in its mainstream discourse. The alleged threats to Romania's territorial integrity and sovereignty were core discursive devices, which were directly aimed at Hungary's continued efforts to press for the rights of the Hungarian nationality. Their repetitiveness was aimed at creating a collective psychosis that would result in a more compelling popular support for the regime and a pervasive intoxicated perspective on inter-ethnic relations. The communist elites promoted the dangerous implications of subversive factors which (supposedly) loomed both from the outside (the USSR, Hungary and later the Hungarian émigrés in the US) as well as from the inside (pointing to the disloyalty the Hungarian minority supposedly nurtured disloyal relations with Hungary).

Territory is a defining feature of Romanian communist nationalism. Therefore, one may logically infer that the rhetoric reification of the Romanian nation was constructed by comparison and contrast with an external element (the Hungarian nation) that became internalized and possibly threatening due to the significant and quite organized Hungarian minority in Romania.

To support this argument, I explain the 1970's and 1980s forced mass migration of Jews and Germans from Romania³ as correlations of the "territoriality" factor. Apart from the economic reasons that prompted this policy, another element was

¹ Nicolae CEAUȘESCU, *Soluționarea problemei naționale...cit.*, p. 48.

² *Ibidem*, p. 82.

³ For more details on the forced migration of Jews and Germans from Romania, see Radu IOANID, *Răscumpărarea evreilor: Istoria acordurilor secrete dintre România și Israel*, Romanian transl. by C. Dumea and M. Mircea, Polirom, Iași, 2005.

consequential – neither Israel nor Germany could have territorial claims on Romania. This exclusionary type of nationalism was clearly different from the assimilatory type directed at the Hungarian minority.

An argument that supports this thesis is put forward by Rudolf JÓO, who contends that although the national communist regime was deeply ethnocentric, occasional concessions were made to minorities, as part of a game of “give and take”. This strategy’s prime aim was that after a stage of intensification in curtailing minority rights, there were periodic concessions that were aimed at mitigating the tone of minority dissent¹. These shifts in emphasis were also reflected in the regime’s increasing rhetorical rejection of external intrusion in what was perceived as falling under the exclusive authority of the Romanian state.

To illustrate the obvious connection between the external political context and Romania’s nationality policy, I refer to one of Ceaușescu’s speeches in the late 1970s, one which warns against “the use of nationalities as a pretext for interference in Romania’s internal affairs”². At that time, there existed more or less overt disputes between Hungary and Romania concerning the importance that national minorities should have in shaping inter-state political relations. Romanian communists were keen on keeping matters regarding nationalities entirely in the hands of the Romanian state, while Hungary argued for the “externalization” of this matter. One of the resulting claims was the constant monitoring on the part of the Hungarian state. The counterbalancing act to these repeated pressures coming from Hungary found its discursive discharge in speeches or statements such as the afore-mentioned one.

As an overall characteristic of Ceaușescu’s discourse, the wide uses of euphemisms or ill-defined concepts as key mechanisms of manipulating standard language and creating a new pool of words to express (or rather veil) national communism realities. Therefore, I argue that the underlying national communist rhetoric pattern was the sheer “dichotomy of word and fact”³. To just offer a selection of examples, I would point to often empty catchphrases such as

“the fulfillment of the tasks of the socialist development of Romania”; “material and cultural welfare of the entire people”; “social advancement [as] the basis for ensuring the genuine equality of rights of all working people, regardless of nationality”; “the united struggle of the entire people”; “the blossoming of the spiritual life of co-inhabiting nationalities”; “brotherhood of working, fighting and ideals”; “the liquidation of social and national exploitation”; “full equality of rights among all citizens, irrespective of nationality”; “the national problem in the context of the edification of the multilaterally developed socialist society”;

the thesis according to which Romania is a multinational state “doesn’t correspond to reality”, while the fact that different nationalities live on Romania’s territory is the result of “historical developments” etc.⁴

¹ Rudolf JÓO, *The Hungarian Minority’s Situation in Ceaușescu’s Romania*, English transl. by C. Tennant, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 46.

² Nicolae CEAUȘESCU, *Soluționarea problemei naționale...*cit., p. 83.

³ My reasoning was prompted by J.W. Young’s analysis of totalitarian language’s “dichotomy of word and fact”. J.W. YOUNG, *Totalitarian Language: Orwell’s Newspeak and Its Nazi and Communist Antecedents*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville & London, 1991.

⁴ These standard phrases are recurrent (in either identical or very similar format) throughout the range of discourses falling under scrutiny in this article: Nicolae Ceaușescu, 1970, 1971, 1979 etc.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has critically analyzed the key rhetoric patterns that the Ceaușescu regime used to mold ethnic belonging into a prime marker of popular allegiance and legitimation. I have argued that national communist rhetoric (as the regime itself) can be better understood if related with at least two contiguous elements¹: Hungary's kin-state policies and its support for the mobilization of Romania's Hungarian minority against its attempted forced assimilation; and the resistance of the ethnic Hungarians themselves against oppressive measures aimed at dissolving their cultural identity.

My aim has been to assess whether there existed a direct and determining relationship between the aforementioned factors. Due to the narrow scope of this article, I have chosen to focus less on the description of events and more on Romania's reaction to external pressures for minority protection (as it was reflected in the official discourse).

Without falling into the trap of retrospective determinism, the patterns of national communist rhetoric do show a constant trend of "evolution". The major themes are largely the same in the period under scrutiny in this article (1970), but one can easily discern important shifts along that line – first and foremost in terms of their escalation. While initially falling under a general defensive reconciliatory tone, the 1970s subsequently marked the passage to a progressively offensive tenor (inflamed in the 1980s).

The two-fold manifestations of the Ceaușescu regime – the defensive inclusive rhetoric and the offensive anti-minority policies – were thus vital in keeping the Hungarian minority's political mobilization under the warning level for the regime's stability and undisputed legitimacy. As previously emphasized, one of the markers of national communist discourse was a "smokescreen" rhetoric that provided the perfect cover for ethnonationalist policies of forced assimilationist. Although the language of national communism started off as rather covert in its intentions towards the Hungarian nationality, the 1970s witness a gradual process through which the Romanian Hungarians were singled out as direct targets of rhetoric (and practices). The policies that were aimed at the destruction of the Hungarian identity and cultural specificity were shunned under the euphemistic use of terms. However, a careful reading can detect progressively overt connotations and uncompromising implications. Overall, Ceaușescu's national communist rhetoric was context-dependent and thus shifted both in terms of shape (selective emphasis) and in content (gradual radicalization).

One of the defining features of Ceaușescu's Romania was that rhetoric and social facts were at odds. Romanian elites engaged in a reversed process: rhetorical means and highly repressive actions were the leaders' instruments in "imagining" social facts and reinterpreting them according to ideological lines. Intended at effacing ethnic diversity and ensuring the undisputed hegemony of the Communist Party over the Romanian nation, this rhetorical charade had disastrous effects on the Romanian society in general and on the cultural specificity and identity of Romania's minorities in particular.

¹ I apply Rogers Brubaker's "triadic nexus" to the Romanian case. See Rogers BRUBAKER, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

There evidently was a direct relationship between the increasingly prominent place that nationalities were rhetorically attributed and the deterioration in their formal and de facto social, cultural and educational conditions. Rhetoric – far from mirroring the society – was only a counterfeit representation of it and attempted to “create an utterly false image of the world”¹. Ironically, the ever-growing fissure that was created between rhetoric fiction and reality eventually became one of the key factors of the disintegration of regime legitimacy. One may thus conclude that national communist rhetoric regarding the *nationality issue* exhibited a striking similarity of themes – captured by my analysis – but also revealed the evolution in their increasingly aggressive and radical articulation.

The recurrent emphasis on the alleged “external interference” in Romania’s internal affairs epitomizes the weight Romanian communists placed on the potentially threatening role of the Hungarian state for the regime’s preservation of power. On the other hand, the rhetoric theme avowing the *unity* and *solidarity* of the Romanian people was intended at effacing the cultural, linguistic and religious differences that existed between the Romanian citizens, and had as key target the Hungarian identity.

Identity proved to be immensely resourceful for the Romanian communist regime (as had for others during previous times). The capital offered by this type of politics was overwhelming. It also went amiss. It was not only detrimental to the Hungarian identity or that of other minorities, but also to the Romanian one. Under the protective facet of the regime with respect to Romanian identity lay hidden an aspiration to form a new identity, one that was to even out cultural differences into a common and unsighted allegiance to a ruinous ideology. Forms of dissent such as the preservation of identity against homogenizing trends ought thus be seen as a key factor that hampered an even deeper rooting of the communist mindset into the psyche of all of Romania’s denizens.

¹J.W. YOUNG, *Totalitarian Language...cit.*, p. 61.